

# BELLEVILLE NEWS-DEMOCRAT

## Metro-east inmates find 'positive path' with cleanup work

By CAROLYN P. SMITH — News-Democrat September 26, 2013

EAST ST. LOUIS — Eight inmates at the Southwestern Illinois Correctional Center on Illinois 111 have been recognized by U.S. Attorney Stephen Wigginton for cleaning up federal housing complexes in East St. Louis.

"You may have messed up in the past, probably most of it was drug- or alcohol-related, but we want you to continue on a positive path when you leave here," Wigginton told the inmates, who are slated to be released in about six months.

Wigginton shook each inmate's hand and presented them with a certificate of recognition that he wrote and signed.

Assistant Warden Ron Vitale said despite the hot temperatures over the summer, the inmates completed the work.

"We generally do this and are never really recognized," Vitale said. He thanked Wigginton for visiting the prison and recognizing the men, whose names were not released.

Vitale and Corrections Officer Staci Gardner also were recognized by Wigginton this week. Gardner supervises the inmates while they are doing the cleanups outside of the prison. The inmates cleaned up the following housing complexes: Gompers, Landsdowne Towers, John Deshields, John Robinson, Orr-Weathers and Roosevelt Homes. They also worked along Collinsville and Missouri avenues.

Three years ago, as part of the U.S. Attorney General's anti-violence initiative, a program was started to help inmates re-enter society.

"Attorney General Eric Holder is serious about this re-entry program," Wigginton said.

He told inmates he would be back in November to speak at the Summit of Hope, where all kinds of social service providers would be on hand to help them, including an Illinois Secretary of State hearing officer who will help inmates get state identification cards or driver's licenses. Also, someone will be on hand to help them look for jobs, Wigginton said.

"We do have companies who will hire ex-offenders, particularly in the trades -- welding, electrical, plumbing and diesel machines," Wigginton said.